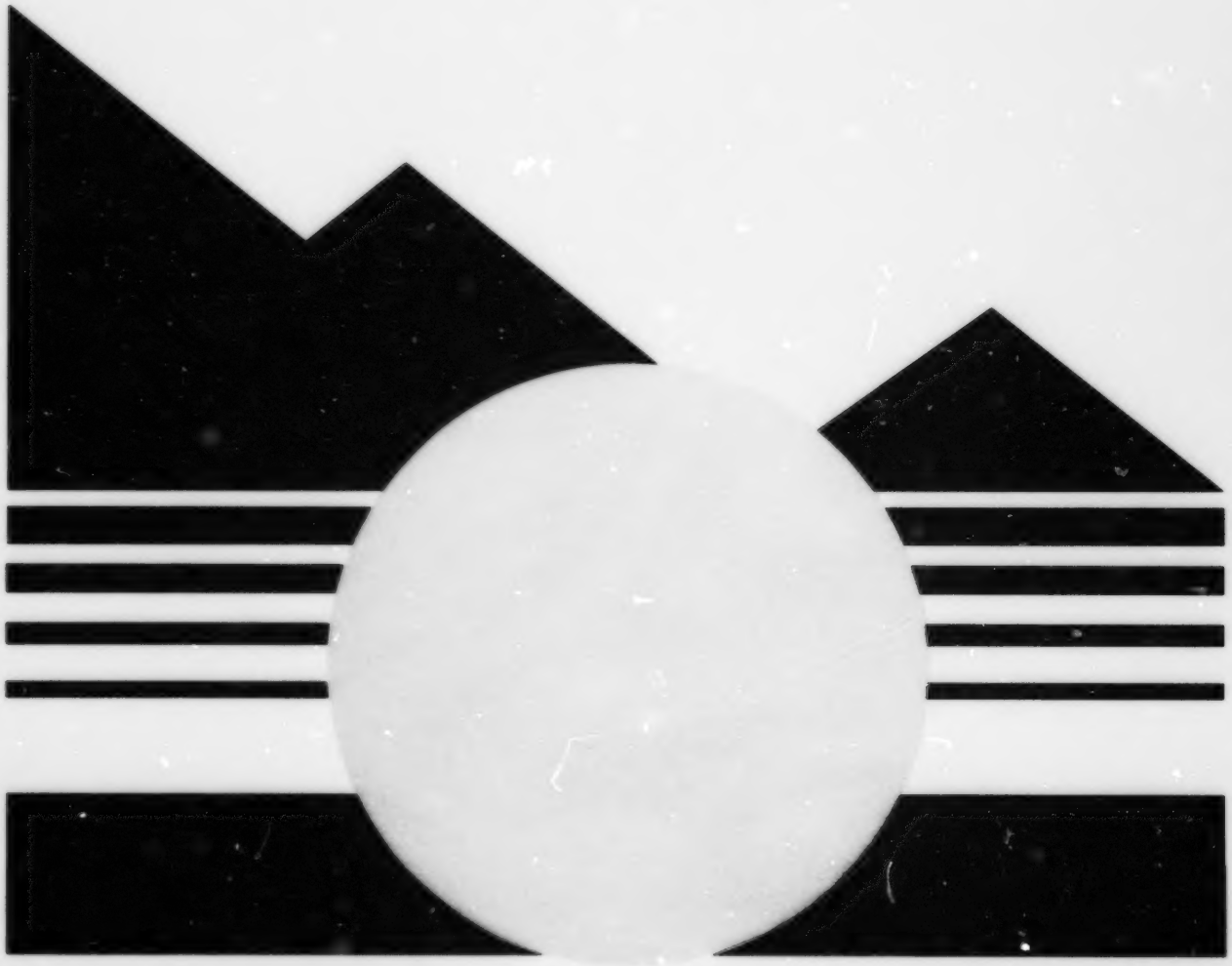
British Columbia Round Table on
The Environment and The Economy

REPORT ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



REPORT

ON

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY

91-02340/

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BACKGROUND

The report of the British Columbia Task Force on Environment and Economy, *Sustaining the Living Land* (The Strangway Report) received over 200 submissions from all sectors of British Columbia. The submissions indicate that the concept of sustainable development is broad, often vague, and not commonly understood and that much confusion exists where conflicting claims are made over a particular issue.

General concerns included the need for a means to obtain multi-disciplinary research which crosses institutional boundaries. Because the concept of sustainable development is relatively new, there is a need for research which melds social, economic and environmental objectives and which provides valid, thoroughly researched input into the related decision making processes. The science of ecology has important implications for social and economic development which need detailed study and definition. Furthermore, there is concern over who conducts the research and which sector provides the funding for the research; objectivity has often been questioned due to a perceived bias in the origins of the work.

Specific comments on the urgent need for research and appropriate funding in the area of sustainable development were received from:

- the School of Community and Regional Planning who expressed the need for "...on-going research to clarify ideas on sustainable development...";

- the Sustainable Development Committee of the B.C. Environmental Network who suggested a requirement for, ". . .endorsement and financial support to research and development for the province. . .."; and

- the Association of British Columbia Professional Foresters who stated that, "continued support for research into ecological relationships and the effects of man's activities is crucial."

It is apparent that many participants in the discussion of sustainable development are seeking scientific and socio-economic research of a quality and nature that will remove any chance of perceived biases in order that recommendations towards public policy can be made and implemented without fear of challenge. This need for relevant, reliable and objective research is being felt in all sectors. Accordingly, the Task Force recommended that " . . . a British Columbia Institute for Sustainable Development should be created."

The British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy was formed as a result of the recommendations of the Task Force; similarly, so were its Terms of Reference. Therefore, the Round Table has been specifically directed to:

> " . . . advise Cabinet on the nature and structure of establishing a British Columbia Institute for Sustainable Development."

Accordingly, the Round Table created the Core-Group for an Institute for Sustainable Development, and charged it with the task of studying and reporting on the need to establish such an organization.

91-02340/

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

BACKGROUND

The report of the British Columbia Task Force on Environment and Economy, *Sustaining the Living Land* (The Strangway Report) received over 200 submissions from all sectors of British Columbia. The submissions indicate that the concept of sustainable development is broad, often vague, and not commonly understood and that much confusion exists where conflicting claims are made over a particular issue.

General concerns included the need for a means to obtain multi-disciplinary research which crosses institutional boundaries. Because the concept of sustainable development is relatively new, there is a need for research which melds social, economic and environmental objectives and which provides valid, thoroughly researched input into the related decision making processes. The science of ecology has important implications for social and economic development which need detailed study and definition. Furthermore, there is concern over who conducts the research and which sector provides the funding for the research; objectivity has often been questioned due to a perceived bias in the origins of the work.

Specific comments on the urgent need for research and appropriate funding in the area of sustainable development were received from:

- the School of Community and Regional Planning who expressed the need for "...on-going research to clarify ideas on sustainable development...";

- the Sustainable Development Committee of the B.C. Environmental Network who suggested a requirement for, ". . .endorsement and financial support to research and development for the province. . .."; and

- the Association of British Columbia Professional Foresters who stated that, "continued support for research into ecological relationships and the effects of man's activities is crucial."

It is apparent that many participants in the discussion of sustainable development are seeking scientific and socio-economic research of a quality and nature that will remove any chance of perceived biases in order that recommendations towards public policy can be made and implemented without fear of challenge. This need for relevant, reliable and objective research is being felt in all sectors. Accordingly, the Task Force recommended that " . . . a British Columbia Institute for Sustainable Development should be created."

The British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy was formed as a result of the recommendations of the Task Force; similarly, so were its Terms of Reference. Therefore, the Round Table has been specifically directed to:

> " . . . advise Cabinet on the nature and structure of establishing a British Columbia Institute for Sustainable Development."

Accordingly, the Round Table created the Core-Group for an Institute for Sustainable Development, and charged it with the task of studying and reporting on the need to establish such an organization.

The Core-Group has met, considered the matter and developed specific recommendations favouring the establishment of The Sustainable Development Foundation of British Columbia.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

Core-Group Deliberations. In the course of its deliberations, the Core-Group for an Institute for Sustainable Development met with representatives of the three universities, the Science Council and the Government of British Columbia - represented by the Ministry of Regional and Economic Development, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology - to discuss, in broad terms, the concept of a sustainable development foundation. As well, in an effort to satisfy its mandate to participate in public consultation, the Core-Group distributed approximately 820 Questionnaires to representatives of all sectors including: private citizens; native, non-governmental and research organizations; industry; academia; and municipal, district and provincial government agencies. A covering letter to the Questionnaire presented a background statement, a brief discussion on sustainable development and tentative operating principles for a foundation. Questions concerning the establishment of an institute were posed in such a way that it would be possible to elicit the ideas of the respondents without putting any constraints on their views. In particular, questions focused on the perceived requirement, research, structure and management, funding, and evaluation.

Questionnaire Responses. 192 Questionnaires were returned, 41 because addressees were not found. 131 of the respondents to the Questionnaire, or 87%, supported the concept of establishing a sustainable development foundation. 90 of the respondents replied as official representatives of an organization; 94% of those were in favour of establishing a foundation. Of the 61 respondents who were responding on their own behalf, 75% showed support. 15 of the 20 respondents who were against the establishment of a foundation were in favour of research or action on behalf of sustainable development, but did not believe there was a requirement for a new facility to do so.

Responses clearly indicate the belief that the ability to develop effective policies and practices that will lead to sustainable development will depend upon timely, accurate research; the need for multi-discipline, intra-institutional research is immediate. Of prime importance, mechanisms must be developed to ensure that research is conducted, and perceived to be conducted, without the influence of any particular interest group.

> The West Coast Environmental Law Association stated, "... the foundation's research should be objective and independent..." and "...that the foundation place major emphasis on improving communications regarding sustainable development issues in the province."

> The Mining Association of British Columbia stated, "The foundation should strive to specific research needs, seek institutions and researchers involved in the research and coordinate efforts at applying it wherever feasible. The action agenda should emphasize socio-economic studies and identify the more serious or real environmental concerns and work towards dealing with them."

There are many issues that are of great common concern to a variety of interested parties. For example; government, industry, and non-governmental organizations are all interested in definitive research in areas such as effluent discharge, air quality, and waste disposal. As well, in a broader sense, there is a need to sponsor further basic research in the socio-economic underpinnings of sustainable development. The opportunity exists, therefore, to seek and to develop partnerships which will sponsor research in such areas of common interest. The academic

and research communities have shown a good deal of interest in undertaking all types of research, but in many cases, have lacked the funding to do so. On some occasions; however, when funding has come from a particular interest group, the results of the research findings have been perceived as biased.

Responses to the Questionnaire also indicate the need for a foundation to be established as a screen or filter between sponsors and researchers. Such a foundation would not actually conduct research but would, on behalf of a sponsor, commission an appropriate facility to conduct research in issues pertaining to the environment and sustainable development including socio-economic and scientific aspects; research in public policy for sustainable development; and environmental technology research and development.

To do so, the foundation would receive and consider unsolicited proposals for research support; identify research priorities and solicit proposals for review recommending action to be taken in regard to research in those areas; commission research on behalf of other parties; initiate technology transfer activities to ensure that research and development results are quickly put to work; and provide appraisals of the state of knowledge in specific areas related to sustainable development.

It is thought that a foundation of this nature should operate through a board of governors and that it should be funded in such a way as to become self-sustaining.

A MODEL

The consistency of cross-sectoral interest affirms that the opportunity now exists and there is a pressing requirement to seek out and to develop partnerships to sponsor effective research in all aspects of sustainable development.

There is an apparent requirement for a means of obtaining results which are objective and serve the principles of sustainable development in satisfying the needs of both the environment and the Province's economic community.

Principles. The Core-Group has reviewed the experiences of other jurisdictions and the expectations of government and the academic community. Following is a set of principles upon which a foundation might be based:

Objectivity. The research should be commissioned and/or directed objectively and in a manner which is open and impartial such that all sectors will be able to scrutinize the process and understand the basis on which the results were achieved.

Collaboration. Given the scope of sustainable development, cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary collaboration should be encouraged in order that environmental, economic, and social problems would be solved.

Independence. The foundation should not be attached to any particular institution or organization in order that it might obtain the broadest perspective and independent points of view in both research direction and results.

Returns. Where work of the foundation resulted in saleable products and services, there should be an attempt made to secure a financial return to the foundation. Such returns

would allow for an acceptable balance among the types of research detailed in the mission statement and enable the management to ensure that research priorities were not skewed because of the sources of the returns.

Flexibility. The organization should have the flexibility to adapt research to and benefit from changing demands of society and the environment.

Relevance. Research and development projects should be relevant to contemporary issues and debates and serve the principles of sustainable development in British Columbia.

Mission. A sustainable development foundation might be established to create a mechanism for facilitating:

- the development of an action agenda for research in science and technology, in health science, public education, legal issues and in socio-economic studies as they relate to sustainable development;

- research in sustainable development that will assist in the development of public policy; and

- research and development in areas that will lead to new or improved environmental technology.

In doing so, the foundation would:

- receive and consider unsolicited proposals for research support;

- identify research priorities and solicit proposals for review recommending action to be taken in regard to research in those areas;

- commission research on behalf of other parties having a need for specific research in sustainable development;

- initiate steps that would ensure that research and development results are quickly made known and any benefits to the Province were put into effect;

- explore opportunities for research funding and fund-raising and develop methods to garner financial support for the foundation; and

- provide appraisals of the state of knowledge in specific areas related to sustainable development for the benefit of interested parties.

Scope. A foundation of this nature would focus predominantly on topics relevant to sustainable development in British Columbia, but would also consider benefits to other jurisdictions, especially the developing nations.

Management Structure. As an over-riding theme for the structure of such a foundation, it would be crucial that it be viewed as completely objective and that its pronouncements be utterly

credible.

Board of Governors. A Board of Governors sensitive to and responsive to the attitudes of the Province on concerns related to sustainable development should be appointed to direct the operations of the foundation.

Selection. Appointments to the Board of Governors would be offered to persons who:

- have such prominence in the community that they warranted public trust and that they would be readily recognized for their leadership and concern for the future of British Columbia;

- reflect the cultural, socio-economic, geographic and gender diversity of British Columbia; however, members need not be residents of British Columbia; and

- would not be currently engaged in research projects sponsored by the foundation or be advocates for particular interests relating to the environment or the economy.

Terms. Members of the Board of Governors should be appointed for terms not exceeding three years and should not be appointed for more than two successive terms. At the outset, members' terms should be staggered such that there is an orderly rotation leading to continuity.

Responsibilities. The Board of Governors would:

- set and approve policy, consistent with the mandate and by-laws of the foundation including short- and long-range research plans;

- approve disbursement of funds to research and development projects and for administration;

- maintain oversight of the mission and objectives of the foundation and undertake appropriate measures, consistent with the mandate and by-laws of the foundation;

- advocate and promote the role of the foundation within and, where appropriate, outside British Columbia;

- conduct liaison with international and national funding bodies in order to secure the financial resources required to commission independent research and approve the receipt of funds from any such source; and

- assign research to appropriate private and public sector institutions, companies or persons at the advice of a Research Advisory Council.

Research Advisory Council. In order to ensure Board of Governors received sound counsel in the areas of research proposed for the foundation, an advisory panel intimately familiar with the issues and research processes would assist the Board of Governors.

Selection. The Research Advisory Council should be comprised of up to 15 persons with the appropriately multi-disciplinary backgrounds, research expertise and experience to permit thorough review of proposal and to ensure that the Board of Governors understands the issues and that the best quality research is made available to the foundation. Accordingly, the Board of Governors would, upon the recommendations of the associated organizations, appoint at least one representative from each of the institutions and groups listed below:

- the Government of Canada;

- the Government of British Columbia;

- the British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy;

- each provincial university;

- the British Columbia Association of Colleges and Institutes;

- the Science Council of British Columbia;

- Provincial non-governmental environmental organizations; and

- the private sector of the Province; and

- further representatives as necessary to achieve desired balance.

Responsibilities. The Research Advisory Council would be responsible to provide the Board of Governors with:

- a technical review of proposals for scientific and academic soundness obtained through a normal peer review process and advisory committees as required; and

- advice on priorities for research and the importance of the research solicited. Research commissioned should reflect the broad spectrum of interests within the Province; for example; government, industry, environmental groups, labour and others.

Secretariat. An Executive Director, with a small support staff would be required to guide the operation and assist the foundation in its policy and planning duties; to conduct the day-to-day operation of the foundation including supervision of staff, liaison with clients, and preparation of work plans, budgets and reports; to establish and maintain appropriate financial management and control systems; and to engage contractors or solicit advice in support of foundation policy. The Executive Director would report to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and would act as Secretary to both the Board of Governors and the Research Advisory Council thereby ensuring a clear link between them.

Funding. A funding model could be developed that would lead to a self-sustaining foundation; there would be a requirement for a broad base of funding to ensure longevity, stability and objectivity. There would, of necessity, be the requirement for start-up funding from various

benefactors; specifically, Government and industry. The aim, however, would be to develop a broad funding base that would lead to financial independence for the foundation. The development of an endowment would allow research funding to be completely unfettered and enable the commissioning of objective research. Accordingly, there would be the need for be four categories of funding:

Operating Funds. Operating funds would be required to cover the salary and office of the Executive Director;

Targeted Funding. It is expected that a variety of interested parties would seek and sponsor research of particular importance to them; the Board of Governors would actively pursue such activity. The Board of Governors would, where required, assist in matching research funding to appropriate endeavours by facilitating the formation of partnerships between parties with similar interests and research demands;

Endowment Fund. In an effort to make available unencumbered funds, an endowment fund could be created with the aim that the interest earned from it would provide adequate funds to finance all research commissioned by the foundation. It would be a priority of the Board of Governors to actively explore the possibilities of raising funds from as broad a base of sources as possible in order that the Endowment Fund could grow to a level that would allow the foundation to be self-funding. To this end, any contributions or returns from patents or royalties could be placed in the Endowment Fund; and

Base Funding. It is expected that a foundation of this nature would require $2 - 5 million annually in order to sponsor both solicited and unsolicited research. As the Endowment Fund grows, the requirement for Base Funding would decrease correspondingly.

It is important that all who might benefit from the foundation contribute to its operation; it would be a responsibility of the Board of Governors to ensure that funds are available to achieve an acceptable balance among the types of research detailed in the foundation's mission statement and that priorities were not skewed by funding sources.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The British Columbia Round Table on the Environment and the Economy recommends that:

1) The Government of British Columbia establish The Sustainable Development Foundation of British Columbia to facilitate multi-disciplinary research and to commission studies in all matters pertaining to achieving and maintaining sustainable development in British Columbia. The Foundation should be developed with the goal of becoming self-sustaining; however, the Government should provide seed funding to begin the process;

2) A Board of Governors for The Foundation be appointed on the basis that they:

   - have such prominence in the community that they warrant public trust and that they are readily recognized for their leadership and concern for the future of British Columbia;

- reflect the cultural, socio-economic, geographic and gender diversity of British Columbia; and

- be neither currently engaged in research projects sponsored by The Foundation nor advocates for particular interests relating to the environment or the economy;

3) A Research Advisory Council be appointed by the Board of Governors and that members of the Research Advisory Council be broadly representative of the diversity of the research responsibilities of The Foundation;

4) That the Provincial Government provide the funds for Operations and the Base Funding for five years or until such time as the Endowment Funds are sufficient to render The Foundation self-sustaining; and

5) That articles of incorporation provide for independent review of The Foundation after three years and that the findings be presented to the Cabinet Committee on Sustainable Development.